

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE & FISHERIES
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Waterfowl Population Estimates
in Louisiana's Coastal Zone Below
U.S. Highway 90 and on Catahoula Lake

Date: Coastal Zone: Nov. 10-11, 14
Catahoula Lake: Nov. 11

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November 17, 2014

Pilot: B. Dorsa

Estimates made from Aircraft

SPECIES	SOUTHWEST	SOUTHEAST	CATAHOULA LAKE	TOTALS
MALLARD	13,000	5,000	2,000	20,000
MOTTLED	23,000	25,000		48,000
GADWALL	737,000	399,000	9,000	1,145,000
WIGEON	6,000	12,000	**	18,000
GW TEAL	155,000	57,000	14,000	226,000
BW TEAL	113,000	40,000	**	153,000
SHOVELER	130,000	20,000	15,000	165,000
PINTAIL	130,000	218,000	100,000	448,000
TOTAL DABLERS	1,307,000	776,000	140,000	2,223,000
SCAUP	9,000	140,000	1,000	150,000
RINGNECKED	54,000	688,000	1,000	743,000
CANVASBACK	0	7,000	2,000	9,000
TOTAL DIVERS	63,000	835,000	4,000	902,000
TOTAL DUCKS	1,370,000	1,611,000	144,000	3,125,000
COOTS	494,000	1,094,000	5,000	1,593,000

**Estimate is less than 1,000

COMMENTS:

The estimate of 3.13 million ducks from this survey is over 3 times last November's estimate of 1.02 million, over twice the most recent 5-year November average of 1.36 million, and over 50% higher than the long-term average of 2.0 million. This is the first November estimate to exceed 3-million since 1995 when an estimated 3.43 million ducks were seen on the same surveyed areas. Despite the overall estimate being far above recent and long-term averages, only 4 species were above their respective long-term average (LTA): gadwall (LTA = 792,000), pintail (LTA = 260,000), scaup (LTA = 41,000) and ring-necked ducks (LTA = 79,000). It appears the very cold temperatures in the northern Central

and Mississippi Flyway states last week created conditions favoring migration of ducks into Louisiana's coastal habitats earlier than in recent years, and the much higher-than-average numbers of gadwalls, pintails and especially ring-necked ducks were largely responsible for the high overall estimate. Along with the flocks of scaup in the coastal bays, which we typically do not see until December or January, hooded mergansers and buffleheads were also noted in southeast Louisiana in numbers more typical of January rather than November surveys.

Contrary to recent years, the distribution of ducks is slightly skewed toward southeast Louisiana where 54% of the coastal ducks were counted. A very large concentration of primarily ring-necked ducks was seen in the freshwater marsh of east-central Terrebonne Parish, and large numbers of mostly pintails and gadwalls were counted in the marshes east of Venice in southeast Louisiana. In southwest Louisiana, concentrations of ducks were seen north of Johnson's Bayou, on the East Cove Unit of Cameron Prairie NWR, and between Little Pecan and Grand Lake. Most ducks in southwest Louisiana were seen in marsh habitats with surprisingly few noted in the agricultural habitats at the north end of transect lines.

The 144,000 ducks counted at Catahoula Lake on this survey was lower than the 154,000 seen last November despite the apparent earlier migration and far more ducks estimated in coastal habitats this year. Inopportune rainfall, and impeded drainage of runoff from shoaling in some areas of the lake created difficulty in maintaining low water levels during the drawdown period. Consequently, there was poorer moist-soil plant production and thus reduced foraging habitat for migrating and wintering ducks. Water levels at the time of this survey were approximately the same as last November's survey, but lower food production is likely responsible for the fewer ducks using the lake.

Habitat conditions in Louisiana coastal marshes are very good. Water levels in southwest Louisiana were lower than in September and about optimal for feeding waterfowl at the time of this survey. Good production of seed-producing annuals and submerged aquatic vegetation was evident in most locations. Agricultural habitats were markedly drier than in September and primarily only managed water was available. In southeast Louisiana, good production of submerged aquatic vegetation was noted on many transect lines with good water levels. Even in habitats where we saw very few ducks, such as the marshes around Lake Salvador south and east to the Mississippi River, had fairly good SAV production.

The northwest Louisiana aerial survey was postponed until this week because poor weather delayed completion of the coastal survey. Weather permitting, northeast and northwest Louisiana aerial surveys will be completed this week and reported in December.